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MANSFIELD, TEXAS, A REPORT OF THE CRISIS SITUATION RESULTING FROM EFFORTS TO DESEGREGATE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. FIELD REPORTS ON DESEGREGATION IN THE SOUTH, FR. 1.

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THIS REPORT OF A FIELD STUDY DESCRIBES THE CONFLICT WHICH RESULTED FROM SCHOOL DESEGREGATION EFFORTS IN 1956 IN MANSFIELD, TEXAS. THIS WAS THE FIRST SCHOOL SYSTEM IN THE STATE WHICH WAS ORDERED TO DESEGREGATE. THE REPORT IS IN TWO PARTS--(1) BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE COMMUNITY AND A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS, AND (2) PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS BY ONE OF THE INVESTIGATORS, INCLUDING A SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSES OF THE CITIZENS IN THE COMMUNITY TO A SERIES OF QUESTIONS. (NH)

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FIELD REPORTS ON DESEGREGATION IN THE SOUTH

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F.R. 1

MANSFIELD, TEXAS:

A Report of the Crisis Situation Resulting from Efforts to Desegregate the School System

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by
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Appreciation is expressed to George D. White, Social Science Research Associate of the Laboratory of Human Behavior, University of Texas, for his valuable suggestions and criticism.

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MANSFIELD, TEXAS: A Report of the Crisis Situation Resulting from Efforts to Desegregate the School System

Background

Mansfield, Texas, is located in the southeast sector of Tarrant County. The city of Fort Worth occupies the major portion of this county. Mansfield is approximately 14 miles from the downtown Fort Worth area. State Highway #287 runs through Mansfield and represents its main street. The population of this farm-surrounded community is approximately 1,500 (about 350 Negroes). A large number of the residents are employed in Fort Worth and surrounding areas.

Mansfield is the first school system (lower than college level) in Texas for which the court ordered immediate desegregation.

Mansfield residents readily state that prior to efforts at desegregation, race relations in the community were good. What is implied here is that a traditional caste system prevailed. A check into factors relating to this reveals that between 15 and 20 years ago, the Ku Klux Klan was active in the community and that at least one lynching of a Negro occurred during that time.

PRESS: There is one newspaper in the community. According to white interviewees, the editorial policies of the former editor (Mr. B.) was a contributing factor to the tension in Mansfield. The paper printed editorials and letters from White Citizens Council leaders for about a year preceding the crisis period. The majority of these letter were signed by Mr. W., a resident of a nearby community and active in the Citizens Council of that community. During the height of the crisis in Mansfield, a Citizens Council was organized and subsequently disbanded. The points made by these editorials and letters are:

a) The Supreme Court cannot "make laws." The court is communist-dominated and therefore deserves no further respect from honest Americans. The court decision usurped legal powers not granted to it.

b) For the sake of their children, parents should defy the court and fight any attempt to desegregate.

c) Biblical quotations prove that the Bible speaks against desegregation.

d) Mansfield is being made a "guinea pig" in being forced to desegregate, since other Texas communities have had desegregation postponed.

e) Separate but equal schools work no injustice on the Negro.

f) Defying "Northern" agitation will be doing both races the greatest possible good.

(While interviewees attributed the above to the newspaper under the editorship of Mr. B.—who reportedly left the community some time prior to the crisis—an examination of several of the editorials [see appendix] during the crisis reveals generally the same policy of opposition to desegregation. This was true, in spite of reports that the owner [a woman] of the paper would have stopped this "if she had known what was being printed.")

Personal animosity between a white and Negro seems to have contributed to the

general ill-feeling between the races. It is difficult to pinpoint the disagreement between the men, but it is generally known that their disagreement culminated in a face-to-face argument.

Mr. F., a white cafe owner on the extreme west of town, was readily identified by white interviewees as the leader of the anti-desegregation movement. Newspaper accounts also identify him as being one of the leaders.

Mr. C., a Negro, who operates a barbeque stand across town, reportedly enjoys a highly respected standing in the community. Reportedly, most of C's trade is with white residents; however, he maintains a section for serving Negroes.

Enmity has existed between C and F for about a year. It is reported that F attempted to get the school officials to prohibit white students from going to the barbeque stand for their lunches. When school officials ignored F's demands, he is reported to have announced that any student who went to C's would not be allowed in his cafe. Interviewees noted that F's cafe is virtually the only place in Mansfield where high school students can gather, have sodas, listen to music, and engage in teenage activities after 8:00 p.m.

It should be noted that much of the hostility in this relationship appears to stem from economic competition. It seems that C sold a tract of land adjacent to his stand (for an amount estimated at between $20,000–$25,000) to a large industrial organization which has built a plant there. Now, it is reported that C has moved his place of business closer to the highway and right next to the tract of land that he sold, so that his stand will be the most convenient eating place in the area.

Chronology

1948-49: It was learned that during this period of time, the school board of the Mansfield Independent School District appointed several Negro patrons as sub-trustees. The sub-trustees were invited to attend all meetings of the board and, according to Negro interviewees, the members of the board welcomed their suggestions relative to the needs of the Negro school. Though the role of the sub-trustees lacked official recognition, it appeared that their opinions were welcomed and, in effect, the sub-trustees had an important say in the hiring of personnel for the Negro school.

At this time, one school was serving eight grades for the Negro students. It was described by the Negroes interviewed as a one-teacher school which had no indoor toilet facilities, no running water (the teacher had to carry water in milk cans a considerable distance if there was to be drinking water in the building), no adequate teaching materials, no school lunch program, no flag or flagpole on the school grounds, and no school bus. In addition, the school was located on a heavily trucked country road. There was no fence to restrain children from darting into the road while playing. Reports indicate that the sub-trustees were constantly pressing for improvements and that a second building (described as a barracks) was later added to the grounds. The "barracks" was replaced by a new four-room school in 1954 which provided instruction through the eighth grade.

These conditions prevailed for a number of years. According to persons interviewed, the sub-trustees made repeated requests for improvements to existing facilities. It is reported that the school board advised the trustees that it would be impossible to provide all the improvements, but that they would be given a well. Repeated reqeusts for improvements by the sub-trustees brought about the abrupt ending of this unofficial arrangement early in 1955.

A chapter of the NAACP was organized in Mansfield in 1950.

April 7, 1955: The Negro patrons of the Mansfield Independent School District, dissatisfied with the lack of action by the school board, retained a Negro Fort Worth attorney to counsel and advise them relative to a course of action. Negro interviewees stated that at this time there was no question about bringing legal action for desegregation. The list of grievances noted were:

a) No school lunch program.

b) Absence of teaching materials.

c) No flag or flagpole on school grounds.

d) School on country road, without fence to restrain children at play from running into streets.

e) Negroes of high school age attending a segregated Fort Worth high school were exposed to undesirable conditions on their way to and from school. The young people were required to take a public service bus from Mansfield which let them off in downtown Fort Worth, some twenty blocks from the school. Though school was dismissed at 3:30 p.m., the first bus back to pick up the students was at 5:30 p.m., thus returning them to Mansfield after dark in the winter months. The specific request made by the Negro patrons was for a regular school bus.

During April to July, the attorney for the Negro patrons was in correspondence and personal communication with the superintendent of schools relative to the list of grievances of the patrons.

July, 1955: Patrons filed a petition with the school board requesting admission of their children to Mansfield High School, which was then open only to white students.

August, 1955: The attorney for the Negro patrons again wrote the school board asking that the board comply with the requests of the patrons by enrollment date, September, 1955.

September, 1955: Efforts were made to enroll Negroes in the Mansfield (white) schools. Admission was denied.

October, 1955: A suit was brought by parents and relatives of three minors but in behalf of 12 Negro high school children in the Mansfield Independent School District.

November, 1955: The Mansfield suit was tried before the Federal District Court in Fort Worth, Texas, which ruled it "premature" and "precipitate." After an appeal before Fifth Circuit Court, the court remanded and reversed the decision, and directed the district judge to issue an order to the school board to admit students without regard to race.

August 22,1956: A cross was burned at night in the heart of the Negro section of the community.

August 23, 1956: A second cross-burning occurred at night in the Negro section of the community. It was reported that the sheriff ordered police cars to patrol the area.

(None of the persons interviewed provided any details on events which might have occurred from August 24-26).

August 27, 1956: A Mansfield Negro (president of the local NAACP and community resident for 50 years) reported receiving several telephone threats to "get out of town."

August 28, 1956: A dummy representing a Negro was hung over the main street of Mansfield. The Mansfield chief of police considered the act, "a lot more serious than pranksters." He added, "I'm kind of uneasy over it," and noted that he wouldn't be surprised by almost anything happening in Mansfield within the next few days. Signs attached to the effigy read, "THIS NEGRO TRIED TO GO TO A WHITE SCHOOL" and "WOULDN'T THIS BE A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE." It appears that where at first there had been some articulation of resentment by white residents of Mansfield over efforts to desegregate, now the resentment began to manifest itself in more overt forms of intimidatory behavior. It was reported that there was "lynch talk" around the community. One white woman reportedly said "it was a shame that wasn't a real nigger hanging up there instead of just a dummy." One Negro woman, returning from shopping in town, observed that, "You could feel the way they looked at a Negro . . . they wanted to kill one."

At this time, it was reported, the mayor and chief of police absented themselves from the community. This was true also of several other persons who might be considered part of the power structure of the community. It is interesting to note that some of the persons interviewed readily stated they didn't want to assume any responsibility.

August 29, 1956: The attorney for the Mansfield Independent School District filed a petition for a stay of enforcement on the Federal Court order to admit Negro students. The plea was turned down. At approximately the same time, a White Citizens Council was organized and several meetings were held. One such meeting was held on an emergency basis in the local pool hall, the day prior to registration. A story was circulated in the community that Negroes would come to school to register the following morning. According to his own account, the local leader of the Citizens Council told the group that they would meet on the school grounds at 7:00 a.m. on the first day of registration, and

proceed in an orderly manner as a protest. It was specified that no violence was to be used. The leader of the Citizens Council, Mr. L is described as a "responsible person" and well regarded in Mansfield. The group was told that in the event a Negro did appear, the Citizens Council leaders would step forward, point to the crowd, and tell the Negro that he was entering the school against the will of the community and over their protests.

White interviewees expressed the belief that the NAACP recruited a large number of Negroes to press for desegregation in Mansfield, that many of the local Negroes went along with the NAACP against their wishes and that some refused to have anything to do with the organization. Specifically identified as opposing the NAACP were C, previously mentioned, and B, principal of the Negro school. White interviewees report that C made strenuous efforts to oppose "immediate" and "compulsory" desegregation and that C made an effort to get Mansfield Negroes to stop supporting what C considered the harmful representations of the NAACP. It is interesting to note that B is described by white interviewees as frightened, but acting courageously hand in hand with C. The petition circulated by B was reportedly an attempt to quash desegregation efforts.

Interviews with Negroes point up the disparity in the information received from the two sources regarding this aspect of the problem. Negro interviewees stated that at no time to their knowledge did the NAACP or any other organization urge the Negro patrons to file suit. While their attorney was a member of the NAACP, he did not suggest legal action be taken until the school board failed to consider their grievances. With reference to C, Negro interviewees state that they do not know of any action taken by him to oppose the action of the parents, though he is reported as being more conciliatory to the point of view of the white community leaders. Negro interviewees also denied knowledge of reported efforts by C to get Negroes to withdraw from the NAACP. The role of B appears to be that of the unsuccessful go-between. Indications are that his status is based on his role of principal, rather than upon one of leadership. The following information was related: in the past, the sub-trustees had some unofficial say with regard to the hiring of personnel. In the instance of the hiring of B, there were some differences of opinion. This reportedly was not based on a personal objection to B, but rather to the Board's hiring of B in the dual role of principal and janitor. Negro interviewees admit knowledge of B's having circulated a statement, but deny that it was for the purpose of opposing desegregation. B, according to Negro interviewees, indicated that he was trying to ascertain how many of the Negro parents were planning to send their children to school.

August 30,1956: A plea for a one-year postponement of desegregation was turned down by the Federal District judge. In explaining his decision, the judge said that the Mansfield school district "is asking me now to do exactly what I did on November 27, 1955, when I ruled in favor of the school district. On June 28, 1956, on appeal by the plaintiffs, it was held that I was wrong in granting in favor of the school board and the Appeals Court reversed my judgment. On August 17, in pursuance with the Circuit Court judgment, a mandate was issued specifically and in plain terms ordering me to enter their judgment and I did enter the judgment on August 27." The judge went on to say: "It would be a direct disobedience" of the Circuit Court to grant the school district's petition for postponement of desegregation. In conclusion the judge said: "I want to say that the attitude that has been taken in this case and that is now being taken by you is one of prayerful obedience to the law and in so doing, that high school will stand as a proud monument to the patriotism and wisdom of the school board."

The Mansfield Independent School District opened for registration. On this first day, a crowd estimated by the press at more than 250 persons, gathered on the school grounds in protest of the court order to desegregate. Other observers estimated the crowd at up to 400 persons.

Three white interviewees stated they heard one of the leaders in the anti-desegregation movement say he received a shipment of knives and was offering them free to any high school youngster who would use them. Other persons indicated that the "brutal" element began to take over—the element that favored "anything" to keep the Negroes in their place, to protect the white children from "mongrelization" and to drive the NAACP out of town. This refers to five men in Mansfield known by conservative leaders of the White Citizens Council as "the radical element." White interviewees expressed the opinion that these men were clever in not openly advocating violence in any way that could be connected with them; however, they encouraged intimidation which was suggestive of violence. A number of persons in the mob, reportedly students, carried signs—"NIGGER STAY OUT, WE DON'T WANT NIGGERS, THIS IS A WHITE SCHOOL," "A DEAD NIGGER IS THE BEST NIGGER," "COONS EARS $1.00 A DOZEN." The dummy figure of a Negro was found hanging from the school building.

The local constable went to the school and, seeing the size of the mob, stated he placed an immediate call to the county sheriff, requesting assistance. The county sheriff arrived on the scene at 11:00 a.m. and advised the milling crowd around him that he was there to preserve law and order.

The interviews with white residents reveal that F, previously mentioned, and M, a white semi-skilled worker, and others of the "radical element" made the rounds of all the stores in the community, asking merchants to cooperate with the protest movement by closing their business and putting in an appearance on the school grounds. Reports indicate that all storekeepers complied, though originally three were unwilling—until they were told that failure to do so might bring economic pressures against them. One shop-owner merely closed up for the two-hour period, going home instead of going to the school.

At this point in the series of events it was widely reported that at a cross-burning the previous week, the ground had been mined with dynamite and that if the constable made a false move, he would have been blown up. It was also said that any white men who showed opposition to the group would be subject to reprisals. (There appears to be no public record in the press, nor corroborating information from knowledgeable people as to exactly where and when these threats were made. There appears to be an absence of adequate information also as to what the constable was or was not expected to do. There is one possibility which was brought out by a Negro: that the constable has a business that is partially dependent upon Negro clientele and, therefore, he might have been hesitant to appear openly antagonistic.)

The Tarrant County district attorney, speaking for himself and for the grand jury which was recessed until September 6, issued a stern warning that the county's law enforcement agencies would not tolerate violence in Mansfield.

A telegram to the governor, from the Fort Worth Negro attorney, representing 13 Negroes in Mansfield, issued a plea to dispatch additional law enforcement officers "to assure that law and order will be maintained." A Mansfield law enforcement officer, queried by the press, indicated "if we need additional help, we can get it quickly." He also stated that he had talked with the Ranger Captain who advised that he and other Rangers are available if needed." The Negro attorney reportedly attempted to contact the governor by phone, without success. He also telephoned the Director of Public Safety (a wire was also sent to him), who indicated that it was the policy of his department to send men only upon the request of local law enforcement officers, and that such a request had not been forthcoming.

August 31, 1956: The Mansfield Independent School District opened for the second day of registration. This was the day it was anticipated that the Negro students would attempt to register. Approximately 500 persons were on the school grounds by 9:00 a.m. (500 persons was the estimate of newspaper men; another observer suggested the size of the mob as more like the 400 of the prevoius day). Part of this "mob" on the second day were the newspaper, radio and TV men from the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Also present were mothers concerned with the safety of their children since they learned that white men were carrying firearms and they feared there might be shooting. Some of the white persons interviewed indicated that there were also "agitators" and "organizers" in evidence as well. (No information is available as to whom the organizers or agitators were, or which side they were on. However, the terms themselves might connote a feeling of white interviewees that these individuals were desegregationists.)

According to reports, members of the mob "voiced open threats." A dummy figure of a Negro was found hanging from the flagpole on the school grounds. It was stated that the organizers of the anti-desegregation movement had done a good job and had taken over completely. (A white person remarked that the feeling of the mob was at such a pitch that if one man had started to run forward for any reason, all would have followed.)

While there were reports that on the previous day, the sheriff's men were armed with submachine guns and tear gas, on this day only side arms were worn, because the heavier weapons aroused considerable ire on the part of the crowd.

Interviews with white persons revealed that vigilante squads were stopping all cars coming into Mansfield asking whether they were coming to town, or merely driving through. Anyone suspected of being sympathetic to the Negro cause was escorted out of town.

The superintendent of schools intended to remain away from school the first day, reportedly afraid of the mob which resented his inability or unwillingness to do anything about the situation. A white interviewee said he went to the superintendent's home and advised him that he would go to

the school and explain the superintendent's position to the crowd. Newspaper reports indicate that on the second day, the superintendent was the first member of the school staff to appear and was quoted as saying: "Now you guys know I'm with you, but I've got this mandate hanging over my head."

An observer from the Tarrant County district attorney's office appeared on the scene and reportedly made some "unfortunate remarks." The crowd closed in on him and, according to an interviewee, obeyed a pro-segregation leader's command not to strike him. However, he was shaken until his nose bled. In addition, members of the mob began kicking him until he was rescued by law enforcement officers.

It should be noted that prior to and during this time, quantities of hate materials were given widespread local distribution. Some of these materials were distributed locally, others were mailed in from other parts of the state and nation. The materials claimed that the Jews were behind the NAACP and that school desegregation was a communist plot to mongrelize the white race, etc. The following is a sampling of the sources of materials, as identified by names and addresses on same:

a) Common Sense, Union, N. J.

b) The American Nationalist, Inglewood, Calif.

c) National Citizens Protective Committee, St. Louis, Mo.

d) White Citizens Councils of Mississippi and Alabama.

It appears that at this point, the leaders of the pro-segregation movement became, according to reports, "a little dictatorship." Reports indicate that they made demands that Negroes with "good" jobs be fired, with the inference that failure to cooperate would be met by economic pressure. It was further reported that demands were made that credit be denied to Negroes. Reportedly, in one instance, not only was the employer told to fire the Negro employee, but also which white man to hire in his place. It was stated that there was compliance to these demands except in two instances. The respondents pointed out that though merchants resented these tactics they did not dare oppose them for fear that such action would be misinterpreted as approval of desegregation. (Little is made of the fact that very few Mansfield Negroes work there, with the exception of domestics, and that such pressure could only have been directed at two or three Negroes.) These efforts had somewhat of a boomerang effect: reports from a Negro interviewee revealed that these difficulties came at a time when the cotton had to be picked, and, as a result of tensions in the community and sympathy for the Mansfield Negro, those from Fort Worth and elsewhere who usually came into the community to pick cotton did not do so. Failure to bring the crop in could have had serious repercussions on all levels of the community. However, it appears that migratory labor had to be used, although in many instances these laborers worked for a day or two, just to secure enough money to go on to a point closer to their destination. It was further reported in this interview that, if nothing else, the possibility of financial loss had a sobering effect on some elements in the community.

September 1-3, 1956: School was closed for the Labor Day weekend and things appeared to have quieted down. The governor dispatched two Texas rangers to the scene, and granted the school board authority to transfer out of the district any student whose presence might incite a riot. Newspaper reports of the governor's action convey the impression that his action was based on a personal decision; however, one of the white interviewees reported that the request for the rangers came from the sheriff, another that it came from the constable. There is no corroboration of the fact that such a request was made, who made it, or whether the governor was aware of same prior to his announced decision.

September 4,1956: With final registration set for this day, a mob of over 200 persons were on the school grounds to continue the protest against efforts to enroll the three Negro students. The Tarrant County sheriff and other officers appeared on the scene at 7:00 a.m. to curb any show of violence which threatened to erupt Thursday and Friday of the previous week. A Fort Worth Episcopal minister was harrassed by the mob when he appeared on the school grounds for the stated purpose of offering a Christian solution to the racial problems in the school district. White interviewees reported that some of the local "preachers" began to speak out, notably the Catholic priest and Methodist minister, who preached against lawlessness. It was stated that as a result, the Methodist minister was severely criticized, and, subsequently, the local newspaper carried references to "pin-headed preachers" who preached the brotherhood of man. (note appendix III).

No Negro students appeared at the school to register. All of Mansfield's Negro students of high school age enrolled in Fort Worth Negro junior and senior high schools.

September 24, 1956: The Tarrant County grand jury subpoenaed some Mansfield citizens (Negro and

white) to testify on the events which had taken place. Negroes interviewed expressed concern over the general procedure utilized, i.e., all the Negro students were picked up by deputies when they debarked from the bus which brought them from Fort Worth.

At a later date the grand jury was dismissed with no announced specific action relative to events in Mansfield.

Personal Impressions

The following are Mr. Griffin's personal impressions of some of the events which transpired in Mansfield as well as his answers to specific questions put to him relative to the crisis situation:

a. During this time no Negroes appeared on the scene and no word has been heard from them. They are keeping at home and quiet.

b. The people have been rendered completely confused. The small group of fanatics more or less control the town and have the backing of the majority of the people who do not approve of them, but approve of their championing of "the cause."

c. At this point a local resident, myself, begins to prepare an article on the situation. The news gets around. Both sides immediately assume that it will be against them; but the White Citizens' Council side is the most alarmed. They tell me to stay out of it. Some express anxiety over my physical safety. I announce, (and Mr. C. does at the same time), that the large majority of the people are following, against their will and conscience, a sub-human species.

d. At this time I am contacted about the study of crisis community situations. I agree to do the research locally, since we do not think the local people would cooperate with any outsiders. I begin to make extensive interviews. I let it be know that the findings whether good or bad will be published nationally.

e. The steam has died down in all except the small group of fanatics. I find great resentment, and after the interviews, I attempt to explain the situation to each interviewee. The findings become obvious and there are many embarrassed and red-faced people here, some who think that what we lost is far greater than what we gained. Those who were the scapegoats—the ones who refused to fire their Negro help, are looked upon now with a certain respect. The tide is beginning to turn.

f. At the outset, it was very difficult to get interviews. But when the story got around, many people took courage and volunteered, among them some of the conservative leaders. If this were going to be published, it was a sobering thing to them—they wanted the record straight, wanted themselves cleared and written down as opposers of violence, and as regretting the whole thing.

g. The fanatics, losing none of their ardor, gradually lost prestige. It began to play out. Still, no one spoke up. The preachers had been repudiated. The feeling of triumph was still strong. Mr. F. was still distributing his pamphlets.

h. On October 15, I sent a letter to the local newspaper. a very impersonal letter, listing the background of the distributors and publishers of these hate pamphlets. Nothing more. The editor came to see me, very contrite. She said she wanted to be on the right side and that if I thought she should, she would fire the people running the paper who had written such inflammatory editorials. I refused to express myself on this. She asked for permission to publish this information, and I gave it to her. The information appeared, as coming from me, and I expected severe repercussions. To my surprise, it was highly praised. People said they hadn't realized how they were being used by hate

groups. They said it would have been better to go ahead and integrate than to be lead astray in this manner.

i. The local newspaper has ceased publishing editorials having anything to do with the situation, but this week they published a very long letter from the Methodist minister, who decided to speak out in public also. The fanatic opposition is temporarily quiet, and they have lost all prestige in the community; although the community is still torn with false statistics, propaganda, and residual beliefs aroused against the Negroes and Jews. Perhaps it might be more exact to say that there are a number of individual fanatics left in town—men and women who still think they acted gloriously and who think it would have been even more glorious if a Negro or two had been killed—"just to show them." But these people have no respect for the radical leaders, and not much respect for each other.

j. The subsidiary effects arising from the crisis situation were horrifying to most of the people who now view them in retrospect. These effects would appear to be:

1) The pattern of a fanatical group taking over, forming a dictatorship as oppressive to the white race as to the Negroes.
2) The pattern of working on the young and teaching them bigotry and prejudice.
3) The pattern of the destruction of reverence for values which most people consider of prime importance: namely, destruction of reverence for law, for religion, for human persons, for privasy of conscience.

k. Most people think it will take a long time to overcome the great damage done in these crisis-weeks in this community.

Summary of Answers to Questions Asked by the Author of Citizens of Mansfield

Q — Do you think most people in this community favor or oppose desegregation?
A — Most people still oppose it.

Q — Is this true of the Negro population?
A — Yes, at least compulsory desegregation.

Q — Do you think that most people favor the use of force, if necessary, to maintain school segregation?
A — Certainly they did at the time. It is touch and go now. Another test might prove that most still do (out of stubborness, rather than deep conviction). It might also, if there were enough people willing to express their true feelings, show that most people do not.

Q — Do most people believe that desegregation is inevitable?
A — Most do now.

Q — Does the Negro populace favor the use of force for desegregation?
A — Not the populace of Mansfield, certainly; but that of peripheral areas would appear to.

Q — Estimate of status of race relations before and after crisis?
A — Superficially cordial before crisis. Distrust, resentment, afterward. This will linger for a very long time, in my opinion, and nothing but a reversal (unlikely) could erase it.

Q — Is there any likelihood of reprisals against members of the white race who are involved in opposing integration?

A — No, not by other members of this community; although the most rabid ones are being looked upon with general disfavor. A healthy sign is that people are disgusted with them and that their tactics have ultimately defeated them more than any open opposition could have.

Q — Is there likelihood of reprisals against Negroes who oppose desegregation ?
A — Not on the local level.

Q — Are there reprisals against whites supporting desegregation?
A — At the time of the crisis, such a man would have been in great danger. Far less so now, except perhaps by a small group. Still, he would probably be ostracized generally, even at this point.

Q — Are there reprisals against Negroes actively fighting for desegregation?
A — On the local level, such a person would be in great danger. He would at least be driven out, but most probably killed.

Q — Do you think many, some or none of the local white residents would abide by the Supreme Court decision to the extent of not using force against desegregation processes?
A — Some—but this depends entirely on the groundwork. The people will follow strong leaders whether those leaders are on the wrong or right side. This has been proved. The Methodist minister in his letter to the editor pleads for respect for the Supreme Court. But for over a year, such respect has been systematically destroyed locally by editorials and letters to the editor in the local papers. It is impossible to foretell. It would depend on whom they followed.

Q — Are white children afraid of physical assault?
A — I think they are more afraid than they admit, particularly the girls. They fear insults more than physical violence. This is not true of children, obviously, but of young teenagers.

Q — Are Negro children afraid of physical assault?
A — They were very much afraid. They are still extremely cautious and nervous.

Q — How do you think the local civic officials feel about desegregation?
A — They feel just like everyone else—they are confused, vague, persecuted, filled with doubts. They oppose it but would probably make some move to leave town again if it were to boil up again in Mansfield.

Q — What is their attitude toward the use of force?
A — They oppose it loudly, but this is lip-service. There is no real opposition to anything here, except outside criticism.

Q — Have economic pressures been brought to bear against the Negroes?
A — Yes, severe ones as demonstrated above.

Q — Have economic pressures been brought to bear against any member of the white community because of this situation?
A — No, because the whites complied under threat of such economic pressures. No severe pressures were actually employed.

Q — At whose request did law enforcement agencies enter the community?
A — At the request of the local constable.

Q — How has the local press responded?

A – It responded to the pressures brought against it—it said just what the White Citizens Councils wanted it to say until recently, when policies were clarified by the owner and new personnel.

Q – Will the students at the school accept desegregation?

A – If properly presented to them, and if their parents and others allow them to, they would certainly accept it. At the present time they would not—not because of convictions about the issue, but because of pressures and prejudices.

Q – Were there outside forces involved in the organization of resistance to desegregation?

A – I can find no evidence that there were. However, they were in evidence almost immediately afterward, and certainly were involved in the latter part of the crisis period.

Q – Were there outside forces involved in the Negroes' attempts to desegregate?

A – Unquestionably, yes. It is significant that the NAACP lost all of its local supporters within the month. Even the local leader, Mr. M., quit in disillusionment and went and apologized to Mr. C. for his part in the NAACP intervention here. It is significant, too, however, that the Negroes behaved with perfect dignity and did nothing in any way untoward during the entire period on the local level. They made themselves invisible, gave no answer, displayed no intention to use force to gain entry to the school, and behaved with perfect tact. This was significant, particularly in view of the accusations against them by the whites, which would have led most people to believe that the Negroes were virtually storming the gates. All of the bad behavior locally was that of the whites. The Negroes advanced their cause considerably by refusing to lower themselves to the indignities practiced by the whites. They showed up far better than those who demonstrated against them.

Q – Do most youngsters of high school age really fear that they, as individuals, will be involved in social mingling with the Negro if he is accepted into the school?

A – I have asked this of many high school students of both sexes, and they all think it is too ridiculous. They fear it for others, yes, but for themselves—they have not the slightest fear they will be involved in social mingling or in any form of mongrelization. Each feels that it would be bad for others, but each feels thoroughly insulated against the danger himself.

Q – What was the group identification of those who participated?

A – Virtually all groups had members there, though not as representatives of the groups. There were no Jews, but there were Catholics, Protestants, and many White Citizens Council men (who were the only official group represented).

Q – What is your description of the crowd process?

A – This has been described above, but it might be added that they were instructed not to "hit" anyone. Their technique when they wished to oppose anyone was to fix their eyes on him and shuffle forward as a crowd, stirring up much dust and glaring silently at him. They tightened around him. One man was rescued by the rangers from this cordon, thoroughly shocked and shaken emotionally; another was physically shaken and then kicked. All agreed that had these men not been taken out by the police, they might have been trampled to death or seriously injured.

Q – Were leaders actually identified?

A – Yes, both the conservative respected ones and the radicals who assumed the real leadership very quickly.

Q – Did law enforcement officers single them out or were they allowed to remain anonymous with a feeling of security within the crowd?

A – Both–The fanatics were singled out, but sociably. Officers stayed close to them, laughed, joked with them, pretended to join in with them, but were there so that they could prevent any display of violence. However, they did little to prevent anything until the last moment in both instances, and then instead of repudiating the leaders for this violence, they merely escorted the victims to safety.

Solutions Offered

List of solutions suggested by various people during the course of interviews:

1. Texas should secede from the Union.

2. A law should be passed whereby all Negroes not willing to remain in the status quo of segregation, not willing to "keep on just like they are and like we want them" should be allowed to sell out and keep their money, be provided with passage to Africa, given a thousand dollar bonus, and forced to go live with their own kind. It was further suggested that they would lift the level of the savage Africans and thereby do a good service.

3. The radical element in Mansfield should have been arrested the first day of the mob action and put into jail. Anyone defying the law should have been immediately arrested. They should not have been allowed to interfere by threats of force with what is clearly the law. It is felt by this man that such an action at the outset would have solved the problem quickly and effectively and at least have averted the precedent establishing success of the Mansfield efforts. This success, he pointed out, has resulted in stickers and mottos being widely distributed, which read: REMEMBER MANSFIELD.

4. At the age of fourteen, any Negro boy who chooses would be sent, all expenses paid, to the "North"; any Negro youth refusing this would be subject to painless and proper sterilization, if not by law, then by groups of responsible citizens.

5. Schools should be segregated according to sex rather than race, having all-boys schools and all-girl schools, through high school; then integrated colleges.

6. One Negro suggested that if they segregated schools according to intelligence rather than race, it might prove of interest.

7. The Congress should impeach the entire Supreme Court and begin again.

8. All Jews should be sent to Israel, all Catholics should be shipped to Rome, all Communists should be shipped to Russia, all Negroes should be shipped to Africa and leave America to the Americans. It was further suggested that each of these groups be dumped half-way across and allowed to swim the rest of the way.

All of these opinions except No. 6, were offered with complete seriousness by those proposing them.

Traceable Subsidiary Effects

1. *Anti-Semitism,* strong since propaganda has blamed Jews for activities of NAACP.

2. *Anti-Semitism* implied, since some publicity has referred to Hitler's eradication of the Jews as a model we should follow in eradicating the threat of Negro racial "pollution."

3. *Anti-Christianity,* very pronounced in editorials denouncing "pinhead preachers" who advocate the brotherhood of man.

A) *Anti-Catholicism,* slight.

B) *Anti-Methodism,* strong in some quarters due to recent official stand taken by Methodists on desegregation issue.

C) *Anti-Episcopalianism,* pronounced due to the attempts of Rev. Clark to intervene in the mob action.

4. *Anti-Community Chest & United Fund,* due to propaganda put out by National Citizens Protective Assn., St. Louis, Mo., alleging that local United Fund supports "the anti-white conspiracies of the Urban League."

5. *Anti-Juridic,* since this has convinced many that the Supreme Court's decision was wrong and ineffectual and that thereby it need not be respected. Indeed, this feeling is powerful here and it has resulted in complete loss of respect for the Supreme Courts of state and nation.

APPENDIX I

About Mansfield

The picture of the former generations in Mansfield is clear: a town quite individualized; respect for religion, but perhaps little display of reverence for it. It was a good and necessary thing for the women. Men often used the meetings, revivals, etc. as a place to pick up girls. There was a type of delicious humor in their blasphemies and attitudes (delicious to them) that, however, left little room for doubt that when an issue of importance or honor was at stake, the men would behave according to ultimate principles. Brought up with reverence for womenfolks.

People in those days had a strange education. The schooling comprised classical studies, years of Latin, etc. The literary diet was chiefly that of Dickens, Browning, Mark Twain, etc. Families that had no conveniences, with children who worked the fields from morning till night, considered it basically necessary to have good books for the family to read during the winter or at bed-time. The humor was rough and robust, men accepted their animality almost casually insofar as modesty about their physical functions was concerned. They used a very blunt and straightforward language in connection with all of this in preference to more covered words, which they well knew how to use. It was a sort of honesty with them and not a mark of ignorance, for most of the old timers can speak and write with a great flair for rhetorical language.

And yet the reading matter was the classics, and in letters, these men express themselves in great richness and proper choice of words.

They looked on nature with complete acceptance; they handled crimes with relative casualness—or at least they speak of it that way now. "I was riding home from a date, it was real late and I was on horseback and had to pass this cottonwood thicket where we'd hanged a man for horse stealing a couple of days earlier. They'd just cut him down and tossed his body in the creek bed, and I'm riding through there in the dark, and I began to think about that and really gave that horse the spur. I'se glad to get out of there."

Murder was considered commonplace. It has been stated that the people who today are the largest property-owners are that way because their forefathers did the most killing. On at least one occasion, straws were drawn to see who would kill the local constable. The one who drew the straw showed up in town with his shotgun, sat on a box in front of one of the stores, and talked with other men until the constable walked down the street. Then he said: "You all better get on inside. I'm going to kill Emmett." And he shot him with the calmness of doing any necessary job.

On the other hand, we see a community more than counterbalanced in the opposite direction. No farmer could get into a jam without his neighbors giving unstintingly of their help. There is a feeling of great underlying decency among the people. A superficial view might indicate that in a crisis condition such as we are now facing, the qualities of generosity, justice, kindness, ratonality, etc., have faded into the background and only the tradition of violence shows through in the mob we have seen here in Mansfield. The countering qualities have become momentarily obscured.

Editorial from the Mansfield News

Sept. 20, 1956

PRECIOUS AMERICAN HERITAGE AT STAKE

We, the American people are right back where our forefathers were when they left England to escape oppression. They wanted religious freedom and were willing to endure untold hardships to gain that freedom.

Today we are facing oppression of a different kind. Our personal freedom is at stake, our racial freedom is being violated. It is a time for all true Americans to open their eyes and their ears. None is so blind as he who WILL not see, says an old quotation. Hatreds are being promoted between races which have gotten along together for lo, these many years. Why can't the whites of this land, as well as the Negroes, see that they are both being used as pawns in a Communistic game to disrupt our nation? Some advocates of integration have been brain-washed by pin-headed, religious fanatical preachers who get up in pulpits all over the land and shout, "The Negro is your brother, the Bible says so, you must have him in your home, in your church and in your school." And, he might add, in your family. The Bible does not say anything about accepting the Negro as an equal.

The two races are as different in customs, ways of thinking and in ideals as they are in color. "East is East, West is West and never the twain shall meet," is just as true as the day it was written. In fact a seer of no mean ability must have written it.